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SUBJECT: PRESIDENTIAL VISIT SIGNALS HEIGHTENED TURKISH
FOCUS ON KAZAKHSTAN

1.(SBU) Summary: President Abdullah Gul of Turkey met with President Nazarbayev and representatives of Kazakhstan's business community during his December 13-14 trip to Astana. Gul encouraged Kazakhstan's participation in Turkey's pipeline projects and discussed investment opportunities. Gul also asked President Nazarbayev for assistance in drawing Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan into a dialogue among Turkic-language countries. A Turkish diplomat told Poloff that Gul's visit is part of Turkey's effort to increase its focus on Kazakhstan and Central Asia. End Summary

12. (SBU) President Abdullah Gul of Turkey, accompanied by the country's Ministers of Defense and Energy and a large commercial delegation, travelled to Kazakhstan for meetings in Astana on December 13-14. Gul met with President Nazarbayev and sought support for Turkey's pipeline projects, including Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan and Samsun-Ceyhan. Orhan Isik, the Head of Turkey's Liaison Office in Astana, told Poloff that Nazarbayev expressed a continued interest in a trans-Caspian pipeline. Nazarbayev added, however, that Turkmenistan and Azerbaijan must settle their differences. According to Isik, Nazarbayev also reaffirmed that Kazakhstan intends to build a refinery in Ceyhan. Gul and Nazarbayev discussed the Kars - Tbilisi - Ahaklalagi railroad, with Nazarbayev promising to commit cargo to the railroad.

13. (SBU) Isik described Nazarbayev as "pro-Turkey" with strong links to the country's leadership. According to Isik, Nazarbayev owns a mansion in Anatoliya which he travels to four to five times a year. Nazarbayev was the first head of state to visit President Gul after his election, which is well-remembered by Gul because of the controversy surrounding his election, said Isik.

14. (SBU) The Turkish government has faced domestic criticism for a failure to engage in Central Asia, said Isik, and is now looking to increase its involvement in the region. A main purpose of Gul's trip, therefore, was to demonstrate to Kazakhstan Turkey's intent to strengthen bilateral relations. Turkey also believes that Kazakhstan, and Nazarbayev, can help to establish a dialogue among Turkic-language countries. Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan have been disinclined to participate in gatherings of Turkic countries, said Isik. Turkey would like Kazakhstan's assistance in ensuring that the two countries participate in the next meeting of Turkic countries, scheduled for Azerbaijan in 2008. Nazarbayev promised to engage Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan and also expressed interest in Turkey's idea to create a secretariat in Ankara for Turkic-language countries.
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